

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS I have become immersed in the subject of Peak Oil, writing two books on the topic and traveling widely to speak to audiences ranging from insurance executives to peace activists, warning of the perils of a lifestyle of oil addiction and of the coming impacts of petroleum depletion. During this time I have come to believe that this is a problem unique in human history, with enormous implications for all components of modern industrial societies. Over the past century we came to rely on a cheap, abundant, and convenient source of energy to fuel economic growth through expanded transportation, industrial agriculture, and ever-diversifying plastics and chemicals industries. Now, as the availability of petroleum enters its inevitable decline, we must find ways to adjust—not only by identifying alternative fuels, but by curtailing many of the activities enabled by this remarkable substance. Doing so will require the coordinated efforts of industry, governments at all levels, and the general populace throughout the world. This will be a daunting challenge, to put it mildly.

Modern societies have faced other challenges in the relatively recent past, including two World Wars and a Great Depression, as well as more localized wars, famines, and natural disasters. Human beings are remarkably adaptable. However in the present instance, the needed adaptation could be profoundly hindered by two likely impacts of Peak Oil—one

economic and the other geopolitical. A protracted and growing global scarcity of the world's most important strategic resource is likely to lead to a meltdown of entire economies, making needed investments in alternative energy technologies and new post-petroleum infrastructure difficult. At the same time, competition between major world powers over remaining oil supplies is likely to increase dramatically and could escalate into open conflict on a scale never before seen. This turn of events would have horrific consequences for human beings and the natural world; it would also overwhelm the ability of any society to accomplish the energy transition in a coordinated and peaceful manner.

Clearly, humanity needs a way to keep these economic and political perils at bay while addressing the complex practical problem of reorganizing its industrial, agricultural, and transportation infrastructure to function without oil.

In 2002 I became aware that Dr. Colin J. Campbell, the British petroleum geologist who founded the Association for the Study of Peak Oil, had authored a Protocol to address this very situation. I read this Protocol document several times and came away thinking that here was a good idea with little chance of being implemented—just another of the many idealistic proposals that are churned out on a yearly basis by academics, concerned citizens, and small environmental organizations.

Then in May 2005 my wife Janet and I spent two days visiting Colin and Bobbins Campbell in the village of Ballydehob, Ireland, and in one long, illuminating conversation Colin explained to me how the Protocol would work.

At once I realized that the Oil Depletion Protocol is in fact practicable, that it would confer immense benefits to signatory nations, and that for the world as a whole it could make

the difference between adaptation and survival on one hand, or chaos and disintegration on the other.

It also became instantly clear that if I—who was devoting myself full-time to talking and writing about Peak Oil—was having trouble understanding the Protocol's implications, then surely much effort would be needed to convey its meaning to the busy policy makers who would have to ratify it, and to the hundreds of millions of citizens who would need to support its ratification in order to embolden their elected representatives.

The Protocol itself is so simple that its essence can be stated in a single sentence: signatory nations would agree to reduce their oil consumption gradually and uniformly according to a simple formula that works out to being a little less than three percent per year. That's almost all there is to it. Why should anyone need further explanation?

If my own experience with the Protocol is any reliable indication, there is in fact substantial need. While the Protocol itself may be straightforward, its historic importance, the means of its implementation, and the implications that flow from it require careful unpacking.

Hence this book.

Throughout the chapters that follow I use the plural pronoun "we" rather than "I" wherever self-reference is necessary simply as a way of acknowledging that, while I am responsible for composing most of the text herein, the book itself represents the work of many. First among these silent co-authors is of course Colin Campbell, who contributed several key draft paragraphs on technical points and was an essential consultant throughout. In addition, I would mention Jennifer Bresee, my research assistant, who not only

found important references but also drafted several paragraphs in Chapters 1, 2, and 4; Julian Darley, Celine Rich-Darley, and Dave Room of the Post Carbon Institute, the parent organization of the Oil Depletion Protocol Project; Pat Murphy, Faith Morgan, and Megan Quinn of the organization Community Solution; members of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil; and many others who have engaged in discussions over the past year, offering questions and suggestions about the Protocol.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my wife Janet Barocco, my general assistant Susan Williamson, and my colleagues and students at New College of California, all of whom make it possible for me to do this work. Appreciation is due as well to my publishers, Chris and Judith Plant, and to Betsy Nuse for her meticulous editing of the manuscript.

This book is written for both policy makers and the general public. For the general reader, I have sought to make the book easy and enjoyable to read, and to provide abundant references.

For policy makers, I have tried to keep the discussion as matter-of-fact and as free from political views as possible. The Oil Depletion Protocol is not a leftist or rightist proposal. It does not try to settle scores. It does not seek to give more power to those who already have it, or to increase relatively the power of those who have little. What it does—and all it does—is to offer a plan whereby humankind can survive the transition away from its dependence on petroleum. All nations, and all social groups within them, will be better off if the world adopts such a plan than if it does not.